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Rainy weather. The girls of the village off to gather mushrooms.
Men make the carrying-baskets.

[facing p. 42]

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[facing p. 90]

The Bemba hearth.
(Photograph posed in roofless house.)

Making a cooking-pot.

The finished pot set to dry before firing.

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415 as (*tunweno*, sing: *kunweno*) in which relish is also served. None of these pots can be covered during cooking, although the process of evaporation can be diminished slightly by covering the food with leaves in some cases. European saucepans are appreciated because they quicken cooking, but even these do not seem to be used with lids.

252 From a dietetic point of view a knowledge of native methods of cooking is of interest, since it should enable us to tell the extent to which the people either preserve or, alternatively, destroy the nutritive value of their foodstuffs by their methods of preservation, and also the variety in diet they are able to secure. To the sociologist cooking is a traditional art requiring more or less individual skill for its performance, learnt by a special educational mechanism, treated as an honoured calling or else as a menial task. It is also one activity of the many that go to make up the routine of the day or the month. Here it may be said at once that none of the Bemba methods of cooking appear very difficult to acquire or are governed by very precise rules as to quantities, &c. They are nearly all very lengthy however and require considerable energy and pains if they are to be successful. Domestic ability is admired and cooking is considered the centre of the woman's social life, but a comparison of Bemba cooking recipes with those of the Ngoni of Nyasaland or many of the Mashona peoples seems to show that the former are in some ways less ingenious in their use of the different foodstuffs available.

Porridge.

The preparation of porridge (*ukunayo bwali*) is obviously the most important task of the Bemba cook. Porridge is the essential element of any meal, and the time taken to cook it determines the whole routine of eating, and indirectly the tribal practices of hospitality.

To make the porridge, grain is threshed separately each day. The work is exhausting, and it is very rare for a housewife to grind a two days' supply. The millet heads must first be pounded (*ukutwa*) [412] to free the fine grains from the stalks. The Bemba use high wooden mortars (*amabende*, sing: *libende*) from 2 to 3 feet high, in which they stamp the millet with stout poles about 3 feet long. Sometimes the 252 woman stands to pound her grain, stamping rhythmically up and ●516 down with hands placed wide apart on the pestle. Sometimes she

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sits on a stool grasping the mortar with her legs. Another method is to pound the grain in a hollow in the ground. Two women then sit opposite each other with legs apart and pound alternately, singing to keep time. Each holds a flail with one hand, and with a quick movement of the other sweeps fresh heads of millet into the hole in the ground. This last method is probably less efficient, but it is more companionable and preferred by young people. The pounding is exhausting work. The women's bodies steam in the sun and the village resounds with the regular thud of the flails.[1]

The grain has now to be sifted from the chaff (*ukuela*). Winnowing consists in sending the grain swirling with a circular motion of the big open basket (*ulupe*) which sends the chaff to the surface where it can be scooped off while the grain remains beneath. It is then pounded for a few moments again (*ukusokola*) and then winnowed again (*ukupunga*). The chaff is emptied on the garden beds around the village and to this the natives attribute the greater fertility of this land. (Cf. p. 281).

It now remains to grind the flour (*ukupela*). Against the wall of the veranda of each house is a small circular platform, about 9 inches from the ground, worn into a smooth groove with much grinding. In front of this the woman kneels, and on it she places the handfuls of grain which she grinds beneath a small stone. This task is reckoned very hard work and the women sing to lighten their labour. The rhythmic to-and-fro of the grinding stone, and the notes of a song, falling flatter and flatter, are the common sounds in a village in the late afternoon.

The flour so produced is of a coarse quality, and careful housewives sometimes grind it fresh before making the thin gruel (*umusunga*) with which a small baby is fed.[2] Some species of millet are distinguished as being easier to grind than others, and the flour is graded according to its whiteness, Kaffir-corn flour being the lightest.

To cook the porridge, the flour is merely tipped from the basket into water boiling in a big *inongo*. The process of gauging the

[1] The conception that the African woman is an overworked drudge is probably derived from the sight of the housewife threshing, but I must add that on the occasion when I was myself most overcome with pity at the sight of the women pounding millet I overheard this remark from one victim to another in reference to myself: 'I don't know how these white women stand it. I should think her neck must ache bent over her writing all the morning.'

[2] Vide, p. 69.

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right proportion of flour to water is apparently gained by experience, and no woman could give me a clear account of her reasons for measuring out what she did. To stir the porridge one of the big flat spoons (*miko*), about 2½ feet high, is first dipped in hot water, and then plunged into the seething mass of porridge. It must be held with two hands, the left at the top and the right near the blade, so that the heavy mass of porridge is moved with the whole weight of the body. This is arduous work and the interior of the porridge is sometimes hardly cooked, especially when a young girl cooks for large numbers. The process is complete in two or three minutes, and great lumps of *ubwali*, now brown and smooth and solid, are scraped off the *miko* into the eating baskets. Here they should be patted smooth with the stirrer into balls like plum puddings (*ukumeta*), a point on which the housewife prides herself.

The process of preparing maize flour is very different and reckoned by the Bemba as a troublesome one. The maize cobs must be pounded for long periods in a mortar before the grains become detached. They are then repounded and the product finally ground into flour with the grindstone. This is the ordinary method used by the women of most of the Nyasaland tribes and in Southern Rhodesia, who never seem to complain of the work. The fact that the Bemba are reluctant to use maize flour probably depends on a number of different factors, viz. their preference for porridge made of millet, the low yield of maize on this particular soil, and the unaccustomed nature of the work, rather than its inherent difficulty.

The preparation of cassava flour is a three- or four-day process and therefore alters the whole household routine. To make cassava flour the roots are dug from the beds as they are wanted and roughly peeled so that the shells come off, much of the vegetable being wasted by the Bemba in this way.[1] The inner part of the root must now be soaked. The bitter cassava contains, as is well known, hydrocyanic acid, but the natives do not apparently recognize the plant as being poisonous. Bemba say that some roots taste bitter, and that these are dangerous, but that it is one particular plant at fault, not the rest. Children are often given cassava to chew raw and no ill results are expected. In fact, among the neighbouring Bisa, unsoaked cassava (*kapango*) is sometimes

[1] Bisa scrape it more economically.

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Winnowing the grain.

Pounding the millet.

[facing p. 100]

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Fetching water for the kitchen.

First steps in cooking.

Grinding the daily flour.

[facing p. 106]

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Heads of cooking-teams. Four grandmothers ruling over 'big houses'. Women and children eat together.

[facing p. 192]

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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The girls kneeling in an attitude of humility

[p. 3]

[p 4 is blank]

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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The 'father's sister' on whose back the fire-stick is rubbed, together with the girl's mother
(See pp. 68, 77)

[facing p 81]